DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 221 809 CG 016 236

AUTHOR Kearney, Maureen
TITLE Relationship between Sex-Role Orientation and Fear of Success.
PUB DATE Apr 82
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association (53rd, Baltimore, MD, April 15-18, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Androgyny; *College Students; Congruence (Psychology); *Fear of Success; *Females; Goal Orientation; Higher Education; Personality Measures; *Personality Traits; Research Methodology; *Sex Role

ABSTRACT

Many studies have attempted to relate sex role to other personality dimensions such as fear of success with conflicting results. The Bem Sex-Role Inventory and the Fear of Success Scale were administered to 101 college women. A significant relationship was found between their scores on the two instruments. Results showed that sex-reversed females experienced significantly less fear of success than did their counterparts who had not adopted male characteristics as part of their personality dynamics. While these results support conclusions reached by a number of authors, they differ from others. Differences among the scales themselves may account for conflicting results. (JAC)

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Relationship Between Sex-Role Orientation and Fear of Success

Maureen Kearney, Ph.D.

The George Washington University

Washington, D.C.

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Relationship Between Sex-Role Orientation and Fear of Success

The Bem Sex-Role Inventory (Bem, 1974) is designed to assess to what degree an individual has incorporated masculine and feminine characteristics into his/her personality structure. Since its introduction, many studies have attempted to relate the sex-role variable to other important personality dimensions. One area of interest for researchers has ben to investigate the relationship between sex-role orientation and fear of success.

The motive to avoid success identified by Horner (1969) as "the fear that success in competitive situations will lead to negative consequences." She maintains that this is particularly true for women who are ambitious and achievement-oriented, and who must deal with their accomplishments in light of society's potential ostracism of their competitive, masculine-like behavior. Horner's ideas suggest that fear of success is more pronounced for non-traditional women who have the desire to compete and achieve than it is for sex-role congruent women.

Some research studies (Major, 1979; Caballero et al., 1975) have supported Horner's thesis that non-traditionally oriented, sex-reversed females experience greater fear of success. Other researchers (Sadd et al., 1979; Gayton et al., 1978) report that sex-reversed females exhibit significantly less fear of success. Still other investigators (Savage et al., 1979; Depner and O'Leary, 1976) found no relationship between the two variables. Since we see conflicting results in these studies, it would seem useful to search for some reasons for these outcomes. The results obtained in a number of recent studies are summarized in Table 1, which also includes the significant findings of the present investigation.

Subjects and Procedures

One hundred one females from George Washington University were administered the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) and the Fear of Success Scale (Good and Good, 1973).

The BSRI consists of a list of 60 adjectives: 20 are commonly thought of as describing masculine traits, 20 are feminine and 20 are so-called "neutral" items. By the respondent's endorsement of masculine or feminine-oriented items, his/her sex-role orientation is presumed to be measured.

The FSS consists of 29 statements which require a true or false response and is designed to assess the degree to which the individual is governed by a motive to avoid success. It has been hypothesized that this tendency stems from a concern that achievement-oriented behaviors in women will be viewed by society as unfeminine and will therefore be subject to disapproval.

After gathering the data from the above-mentioned instruments, multiple regression techniques were used to determine whether significant relationships existed between them.

Results, Implications and Conclusions

For the females in the present study, a significant relationship ($p<.001$) is found between the BSRI and the FSS. The masculinity scale contributes significantly at the .001 level with a negative regression coefficient. The femininity scale, however, shows no correlation with fear of success. Thus the results of the present study show that sex-reversed females experience significantly less fear of success than do their counterparts who have not adopted male characteristics as part of their personality dynamics.

This finding supports the conclusions reached by several of the authors cited in Table I and is at variance with others. A number of factors seem

to explain the lack of consistency in the results of these experiments. An obvious discrepancy exists in the test instruments experimenters have chosen for their measures of sex-role orientation and fear of success. Therefore, differences among the scales themselves will account for the conflicting conclusions reached in the studies. Furthermore, there appear to be difficulties inherent in the use of specific scales. For example, sex-role instruments used in some studies treat masculinity and femininity as two independent constructs (as in the BSRI), while others view them as two ends of a continuum. Also, Horner employs a projective technique to measure fear of success and a number of authors (Sadd et al., 1979; Ward, 1978; Zuckerman and Allison, 1976; Tresemer, 1973) have found this approach to be problematic. They observe that the methodology used for administration and scoring of the single verbal cue results in the instrument's low reliability and predictive validity. In addition, there is some evidence to suggest that fear of success is a fairly complex psychological construct. Recent studies (Shapiro, 1979; Cabassol, 1978; Janda et al., 1978) show fear of success responses occur for <u>both</u> sexes if gender-inappropriate behavior is presented as a cue. It would seem, therefore, that the presence of these cues distorts an accurate representation of fear of success and the results of studies employing these cues need to be treated with caution. Shapiro (1979) suggested using an instrument which would "depict an abstract form of success not defined in terms of any one, specific activity." The Fear of Success Scale developed by Good and Good conforms to this recommendation. Items on this instrument do not present sex-role appropriate or inappropriate behaviors, but rather introduce questions which assess a more generalized motive to avoid success.

In summary, the present study investigated the relationship between sex-role orientation and fear of success as these constructs apply to women.

Significant correlations ($p < .001$) were found indicating that sex-reversed women experience less fear of success than their sex-congruent counterparts. These results support conclusions reached by a number of authors, but differ from others. Explanations for the lack of consistent findings were discussed.

Table 1

Results of studies relating fear of success and sex-role orientation

Study	Scale of Sex-Role Orientation	Fear of Success Instrument	Direction of Significant Results, if any
Present study	BSRI	Good and Good	Sex-reversed females experienced lower FOS
Caballero et. al.	Questionnaire[1]	Horner	Non-traditional females experienced greater FOS
Depner and O'Leary	Malferr Inventory of Feminine Values	Horner + 3 additional verbal cues	No significant relationship
Gayton et. al.	BSRI	Good and Good	Sex-reversed females experienced lower FOS
Major	BSRI	Scale designed by Major, based on Horner	Sex-reversed females experienced greater FOS
Sadd et al.	RSRI	Objective fear of success measure constructed by author	Sex-reversed females experienced lower FOS
Savage et al.	Modified Gough M-F Scale	Horner + 5 additional cues	No significant relationship

[1]Questionnaire based on concepts presented by C. Tavris in "The Female Experience".

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